

## 19th Chapter of the Abbot General OCist for the MFC - 16.09.2013

As I pointed out last Saturday St. Benedict always speaks about the Divine Office by inserting it into the reality of the human life that we live. But the fundamental human reality is our heart, what we are deep down in our soul, in our "I" which is largely a mystery even to ourselves. As I said, Benedict censors nothing regarding our humanity when he inserts the Office into our lives. This, however, does not mean that one has to bring everything to the Office. If Benedict says that digestion should be finished before Vigils, and that we should allow time between Vespers and Lauds for the necessities of nature, we also understand that the reason is so that we are not disturbed during the Office by these aspects of our humanity. In the same sense he prescribes that the oratory of the monastery should be free from any other function that is not prayer (cf. RB 52:1). St. Benedict does not censor anything, takes everything into account, but he does this above all so as not to censor the most hidden and often forgotten dimension of our human nature: our heart created by God in his image and likeness, created to live in communion with Him in love.

So, when Benedict, at the end of all the chapters that organize the Divine Office, gives us the fundamental instruction on how to live communal prayer well, he says: "*Mens nostra concordet voci nostrae* - that our mind may be in harmony with our voice" (RB 19:7), that is, be in harmony with the words of the prayer. Benedict makes us understand that every Divine Office is a work of God in our heart, a work that God is doing within us, in the depths of our "I". And God does this work speaking to us, with his Word that we repeat and sing in order to better listen to it, in order to let it operate more deeply in us.

The radiation of God's work in our whole life starts from the echo of His Word in our hearts. The echo of his Word which is the echo of his presence, the echo of the Word of God in us. This makes us understand that the first condition for the radiation of God's work in us is a silence within ourselves which allows the Word of God to resonate in us and through us.

Silence, lived in this way, is not a censorship of our humanity, of our relationships, or regarding the world. Silence recognizes that if we censor God who speaks to us, we really censor everything, for we censor the meaning of everything, and we censor the harmony and communion with everything; that love for all things which God alone can make possible in our hearts if we are attentive to Him. If there isn't a silence that looks and listens to the Lord, we lose the center of the work of God, and our life cannot radiate it, one cannot be a witness to it when meeting everyone and everything.

In this regard, we always need to meditate on the Gospel about Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42). Jesus came into that house "while they were on their way" (v. 38), that is, as the pilgrim God who passes by evangelizing the poor, as the Word of God made flesh,

made man, present in the world, in order to communicate to us the truth and beauty of all reality.

The difference between Martha and Mary is not between action and contemplation, but it is a difference of attention and listening with regards to Jesus. Mary sits and listens. Jesus is talking, he has started to teach even in that house. Mary has put her mind, her heart in accord with the voice of Jesus. Martha's problem is not the fact that she was working, but the fact that her heart was not silent so as to listen to the Lord. I imagine that at the time of Jesus, in a village like Bethany, the homes didn't have, as they do today, a kitchen, a living room, a drawing room, a separate parlor: everything was in one space. So, nothing prevented Martha from listening to Jesus while preparing lunch. But she didn't chose this silence, this choice to listen, to be attentive to Jesus more than to the other things. The result is that her heart was not in silent concord with the presence and the voice of Jesus; so she came into conflict with everything and everyone. Luke writes that she was "distracted" with all the serving (Luke 10:40). That is, her heart, her attention were "pulled" from all sides, by a multitude of things to do. She lost the unity within herself. She lost the center. And then her relationship with everything became a mess: she lost harmony with the work she did, she lost harmony with the people whom she gave hospitality to, with his sister, and even with God, for she interrupted the teaching of Jesus to make a hysterical scene in front of everyone, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve all by myself?" (Luke 10:40). In one sentence she succeeded in expressing all the poison and the discontent seething in her against Jesus, Mary, the other guests, her work and herself, that is, against all reality.

Here you have it, this is the situation in which we decide whether or not we live with silence. Silence concerns our relationship with everything: ourselves, God, others and work. Silence is a decision to be attentive and to listen that allows Christ to be the center of all the reality in which we live and to harmonize it with his love and his peace.

The Lord knows that 99.99% of people are more like Martha than like Mary. We are like Marta; Mary is an ideal. Jesus knows this and he gives us his word even within the chaos of our dissipation from Him; and it is a word that reveals to us the truth of our uneasiness, our universal discontent; it creates in us a new silence, a humble silence, repentant, in which the word of Christ can finally take action, transforming our lives: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part, which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41-42)

We note that Martha does not reply to what Jesus says. There is a great silence. The word comes down in her heart as through a wound. Her anger deflates. She feels sad, but also at peace, and she feels a new joy gushing up in her. She feels changed by this word, because it is a word of God that recreates her, that frees and redeems her.

And she discovers that her relationship with the whole of reality is now different. Jesus loves her very much, and her life and her heart truly "matter to him". Her sister Mary is not a slacker, but someone she can look to and learn about the correct relationship with Jesus. All the tired and hungry people who filled her home are disciples of Christ who follow him everywhere to listen to Him, they sleep in the middle of the fields, and often they do not even have time to eat because of the crowds. And Jesus has chosen her home so that they, too, at least for today, can find a bit of peace, closeness, and eat and drink well. And Martha herself is no longer in her own eyes one who has to always prove that she's good, better than the others, who works hard, who cooks well, who thinks of everything. She is one whom Jesus calls by name, "Martha, Martha," twice like the patriarchs and prophets, as "Abraham, Abraham," as "Samuel, Samuel," one who is called to listen to Jesus, to incarnate his word, to incarnate the Word of God. Jesus calls her by name and talks to her because he loves her soul, the peace of her heart, and the unity of her life. She is also chosen, pre-chosen, primarily not to do this or that, but to recognize and listen to the presence of God who saves.

If you go and read chapter 11 of the Gospel of John about the resurrection of Lazarus you will see how far Martha's silent conversion, which began here, has progressed. From listening to that first word and call that Jesus addressed to her, Marta will come to confess, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world!" (Jn 11:27). Nobody, not even the apostles, has confessed, before the resurrection of Jesus, a faith as great!

It is with this attitude that St. Benedict asks us for silence and listening with regards to the Divine Office, which is precisely the moment when the Lord is present in our home and speaks to us. It is there that he asks us to choose the better part, and this choice is the humble silence that listens, for the best part is precisely He who speaks to us.

I do not know if you noticed the other night while at dinner, Fra Michel Angelo was reading the Rule. He read chapter 6 on silence as a renunciation of the word that loses us in vain things, and then he continued the beginning of Chapter 7 on humility, without giving us the title of the Chapter. Did you notice something strange? I noticed it for the first time. Immediately after the chapter on silence, which insists on silence and listening (cf. RB 6.6), Chapter 7 starts with the words: "*Clamat nobis Scriptura divina, fratres ...* - The Scriptures cry out to us, brothers..." (RB 7:1). Here the Scriptures cry out to us about the mystery of Christ's humility, but what I simply want to point out is that once again St. Benedict asks us for a silence that allows the Word of God, not only to speak to us, but to cry out the truth of life. The more there is silence in us, the more the voice of the Lord can resonate; and the more the voice of God can resonate, the better he can transform our hearts and our lives, and enable us to radiate the faith, like Martha of Bethany.

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